DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 418 082 SP 037 873

AUTHOR Wilson, Elizabeth
TITLE Educator Training in Homosexual/Bisexual Youth Issues: Research Issues and Methods.
PUB DATE 1998-02-25
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (New Orleans, LA, February 25-28, 1998).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attitude Change; Behavior Change; Bisexuality; Consciousness Raising; *Educational Environment; Educational Research; Faculty Development; *Homophobia; *Homosexuality; Inservice Teacher Education; Program Evaluation; Public Schools; Secondary Education; Secondary School Students; Secondary School Teachers; Stereotypes; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Improvement

ABSTRACT

As a result of hostile climates for homosexual/bisexual students, dropout rates, substance abuse, homelessness, isolation, and identity problems are growing rapidly. Recent court decisions hold educators and schools responsible for the safety and education of these youth. However, there is no consensus on how to teach such controversial issues to educators. A major obstacle to changing the hostile environment for homosexual/bisexual youth lies within the anti-gay attitudes of educators. Educator training must change the attitudes of teacher trainees and all members of the school community. In order to do this, researchers must measure behavior changes that are believed to result from the training. While case study reports have an emotional appeal, large scale, empirical investigation of the ability to change attitudes and behavior are needed to validate educator trainings. The multitude of questions surrounding the usefulness of training educators in homosexual/bisexual youth issues makes widespread investigation imperative. In order to influence public opinion, these studies must be conducted by individuals who are able to remain completely detached from the study and its results, and they must be done with highly reliable and valid measurements that are above reproach. In order to use research results effectively, researchers must ask how to implement program changes and how to use research data to demonstrate program effectiveness. (Contains 24 references.) (SM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 418 082

Educator Training in Homosexual Bisexual Youth Issues

Research Issues and Methods

Elizabeth Wilson

Western Kentucky University

Presented at the 1998 AACTE Conference

New Orleans, LA

Feburary 25, 1998

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

E Wilson

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

SB378435

Many issues relating to homosexual and bisexual youth have been investigated over the past decade. Statistics released concerning this population indicate that "young gays and lesbians are 6 times more likely to attempt suicide than" their heterosexual peers (The Center, 1994, p. 1), and that homosexual bisexual youth are harassed and abused frequently by other students and teachers within their high-school environments (Lipkin, 1996 & Sears, 1989). Dennis and Harlow (1986) describe the public high school as a place that "means ridicule from teachers, violent harassment from fellow students, and refusals from administrators to punish verbal and physical attacks upon them," for homosexual bisexual students (p. 446).

According to the Third Annual Report of The Safe Schools Anti-Violence Documentation Program (Reis, 1996), seventy-seven reports of anti-homosexual bisexual harrassment and violence have been reported in Washington schools. These incidences included seven "gang rapes," fifteen "physical assaults," twelve cases of "physical harassment and or sexual assault short of rape," thirty "on-going verbal and other harassment" incidences, and one incident where a school-sponsored function "included a comedic reenactment of a gay-bashing" (Reis, 1996, p.1).

In addition to, or as a result of this hostile climate, drop-out rates, substance abuse, homelessness, isolation, and identity problems are being reported among this population in alarming numbers (Massachusetts Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, 1994; & McFarland, 1993).

In a recent court case a judge ruled that "the public school, and school officials as individuals, may be held liable for monetary penalties for failing to address anti-gay abuse of a student by other students," making the addressing of needs in this population an economic, as well as a human-rights, issue for schools (NEA, 1997, p.1). On the heels of this decision and other court orders which have held educators responsible for providing equal services to homosexual bisexual youth,

public schools have begun offering more educator training on these issues.

Governor William Weld of Massachusetts piloted the first (and only, to date) State Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth in 1992 to study the unique problems facing homosexual bisexual youth in that state. As a result of that commission, Massachusetts educators have undergone more formal training in this area than any other state. Other programs within and outside of the schools themselves also do educator trainings that range from a few hours to entire college courses. Project 10 branches in several locations of the country offer in-service training, school support staff, and various programs for homosexual bisexual members of the high-school community (Friends of Project 10, 1993), and courses are offered at several Massachusetts universities, including Harvard's Graduate School of Education (Lipkin, 1996). However, Van de Ven, Bornholt, & Bailey (1996) assert that "despite the growing reports of antigay and antilesbian violence and victimization, little educational research attention has been paid to the problem" (p. 157).

Case Study Verses Actuarial Study

Because of the wide range of teaching time and materials covered in these existing trainings, consensus on how to teach such controversial issues to educators has yet to be met. In addition, little to no actuarial studies have been done to evaluate the success of these programs in changing the ethnocentric attitudes which lie at the heart of anti-gay abuse and other behaviors which may exacerbate or perpetuate the problems facing homosexual bisexual youth. Rather, most literature dealing with homosexual bisexual youth issues and educator training in these issues is case-study in nature.

By definition, a case study is "a report consisting of observations of a single case" (Craig & Metze, 1986). While case study can serve as an effective tool for persuading

individuals that a problem exists, it can only show the existence of change in the number of case studies done. Because of the time and cost involved in doing a single, in-depth case study, the feasibility of doing enough to approach statistical significance is remote, at best. Case study is normally reserved for issues that need in-depth examination and which do not rely on assessing large numbers of subjects.

Furthermore, it is unlikely that a case study report will convince school board members to undertake costly educator training programs that have yet to be proven empirically effective in bringing changes within schools (especially in states that are more conservative). Case studies cannot isolate realitionships between variables and, more importantly, rely on the subjective observations of one person. The structure of case-study itself makes bias nearly impossible to control or eliminate.

Rather, actuarial empirical studies which rely on statistical procedures that are designed to eliminate bias on the part of the research tool and which control for error, are a more widely recognized and respected form of research. Empirical research is recognized and utilized frequently within the educational system already. For example, the issue of ability testing within the schools demonstrates how empirically-oriented our education system has become. If a student tests low or high enough on their standardized test they may be assigned to special classes based on that test information alone. Similarly, educators are expected to pass standardized tests before they are allowed into teaching programs and again before they are awarded a teaching licence.

While a board member may be touched by stories about students who stayed in school because an educator trained in homosexual bisexual youth issues took the time to talk to them, that same board member will want to know that the training programs show a significant change within the school system as a whole before they agree to spend thousands of dollars on training their educators. This type of quantitative

"legitimacy" requires sound measurements of a variety of issues that have yet to be explored in this area. Case-study, no matter how well done, simply does not provide the volumes of data needed to quantify the expenditure of the dollars required to provide this training. Only through actuarial studies can advocates for these trainings demonstrate change in significant numbers of persons.

Research Questions

Despite some outwardly indications that homosexuality bisexuality is becoming less taboo in American culture, research suggests that a major obstacle to changing the hostile environment for homosexual bisexual youth lies within the anti-gay attitudes of educators (Dennis & Harlow, 1986; Reis, 1989 & Sears, 1989). For example, James T. Sears' study of high school counselor's attitudes "'revealed that [school counselors in his study] 'were most uncertain about . . . the degree of exaggeration about children seduced by homosexuals, that homosexuals bring problems upon themselves and really wished they could be like everyone else'" (Wilson, 1997, p.19). Price (1982) also reported that "Vincent examined the attitudes of high school principals, teachers, coaches, and counselors from a rural school and found that more than 50% had 'very negative' attitudes toward homosexuality" (p.470).

Haddock, Zanna, & Esses (1993) found that holding such negative stereotypes about homosexuals can act as a predictor to prejudicial behavior. Their investigation also indicated that persons high on the Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale (RWA) were more likely to hold negative attitudes toward homosexuals. Several other studies have demonstrated correlation between authoritarianism and anti-homosexual attitudes as well (see Dunbar, Brown, & Amorose, 1973; MacDonald, 1974; and Ross, 1975).

For purposes of validating educator training on homosexual bisexual youth issues, this training, at minimum, should be able to demonstrate some significant measure of attitude change among participants. Current research on anti-homosexual attitude attitude change is still somewhat sparse, but several fundamental issues have been addressed. Van de Ven, Bornholt, & Bailey (1996) review a number of ways in which anti-homosexual attitudes within the general population have been investigated. "Most of the instreuments developed only focus on how people react at a cognitive level to various statements about homosexuality" (p.156). Van de Ven and associates go on to criticize this unidimensional style of investigation. Therefore, these researchers investigated knowledge, beliefs, and thoughts "based on the assumption that an underlying beliefs dimension is the essential determinant of attitudes, intentions, and behaviors" (p. 156).

However, broader theoretical research on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (see Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), objective verses biased-information processing (see Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1989, and Petty & Wegener, 1997), Dissonance theory, and Conditioning and Affective Priming Processes theory, to name a few, could be highly relevant to developing empirical te ts that measure attitude change as well.

While attitude change in trainees is certainly a goal of these trainings, a desire to change the attitudes of *all* members of the school community is implicit in many of these trainings as well (Friends of Project 10, 1993 & Lipkin, 1996). Trainings that produce far-reaching change will also be able to show changes within the students, administrators and parents' attitudes. Exploring the impacts of educator trainees on this broader environment is a much larger and more complex process, but it is also a process that can examine these trainings in a more comprehensive manner.

In order for educational training on homosexual bisexual youth issues to impact the school as a whole, behavior changes that are believed to result from these training must

be measured. One method of accomplishing this is to provide scales that measure advocacy in training participants as well as tolerance and attitude. One such measurement, the Wilson Inventory of Training in Homosexual Bisexual Youth Attitudes (WITHYA) currently under design, takes the components of these educator trainings and formulates items from them. Respondents are then asked to rate their levels of competence, comfort, and liklihood of doing each item (e.g. "discussing issues of 'coming out' in today's society with parents"). The ability of this scale to predict advocacy among participants is being investigated by giving actual opportunities for advocacy to post-training subjects (Wilson, 1997).

Other questions worthy of addressing are: Does educator activism produce change? Do resultant policy changes meet with backlash from parents or community members? Are heterosexual students' attitudes changing as a result of curriculum changes (see Price, 1982 for an existing scale used in studying this age group)? Are fewer or more educators signing up for trainings? Are parents aware of changes and, if so, are they being supportive of those changes? Looking at the many possible ways these trainings effect the school environment can offer better evidence for program implementation, as well as offering training organizers the tools to restructure these trainings in order to make them more efficient.

Researchers must also explore how trainee attitude changes are expressed. In order to do this, changes in behavior across a number of participants, rather than a few (as some existing programs have done), must be measured. For example, are educators seeking out homosexual bisexual students to affirm or counsel? Many programs provide safe stickers or other door signs and buttons. What number of educators use these symbols because of their training? How do students' and colleagues' responses to these public displays effect the amount of time educators leave these signs up? Do educators integrate

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

homosexual bisexual history into their curricula? Are educators able to defend their newfound positions (this question is especially relevant with shorter trainings that may have less long-term impacts)? How long does attitude change last after training, and to what degree?

Some of these issues, such as attitude change, can be investigated through use of well-designed questionnaires and rigorous analysis of the results. Still, other questions, such as the ability of trainees to argue for policy changes effective, will fall prey to many extraneous and uncontrollable variables. Therefore, training designers and researchers must generate a variety of ideas about what to investigate and which research methods will be most effective for finding answers about the success of the various training objectives.

Who Will Do The Research

The multitude of questions surrounding the usefulness of training educators in homosexual bisexual youth issues makes widespread investigation imperative. The handful of educators currently running these programs rarely have the training to design reliable psychometric tests or the finances to contract independent researchers.

Traditionally, social and clinical psychologists have generated volumes of literature on a variety of homosexual bisexual issues, and psychologists--especially school and social psychologists--have the training, resources, and contacts to design and administer these measurements. In fact, the American Psychological Foundation (AFP) has developed a research award, the Wayne F. Placek Award, which offers up to $30,000 to "encourage scientific research to increase the general public's understanding of homosexuality" (APA Monitor, 1997, p. 40). This award, offered to persons who have a doctorate, also encourages research with "subgroups of the lesbian and gay population

that have historically been underrepresented in scientific research" (p. 40). Awards such as this may open up the door for psychologists to take on such controversial research.

While psychology offers a high standard for checks and balances in their actuarial studies, psychology does not have a corner on the research market. Educators who have specialized training in test design and administration and who work under the umbrella of a university are excellent sources of potential research. In fact, educators who have existing liaisons with the schools are much more likely to be afforded the opportunity to come into high-schools in order to carry out their research.

Whether a psychologist, educator, or other professional researches these issues, source reliability remains an important issue in dealing with homosexual bisexual issues. No source that I have spoken to or read from pretends that sexual orientation is a popular subject. Like issues of sexism and racism before this, homosexual bisexual issues--especially where children are concerned--is an unpopular subject that, for many parents and educators, represents value judgements rather than human-rights issues.

I am not suggesting that researchers be dissuaded from studying these issues because of public opinion, but it is important to understand that the data many people accept will have two defining characteristics: 1) It will be done with highly reliable and valid measurements that are above reproach. Research that is poorly designed or implemented (i.e. numbers of participants are especially low, test items are ambiguous, extraneous variables are especially high, etc.) can be used in the public forum as ammunition against these programs and, by proxy, against homosexual bisexual students. 2) It will be done by persons who are able to remain completely detached from the study and its results. While it may seem more plausible for trainee organizers or well-funded homosexual bisexual groups to investigate these issues, the weight given to research done by activists activist sponsored organizations will fall under greater public scrutiny and may simply be dismissed by many opponents.

Professional organizations and journals scrutinize research for the benefit of academics, but research thrown into the public forum (which research dealing with minors necessarily will) faces a different kind of scrutiny altogether. For example, Simon LeVay (1996) did research on the brain differentiation between homosexual and heterosexual participants. LeVay's work subsequently entered the academic domain when it was published. In keeping with the theory that research becomes public property when published, many scholars systematically criticized certain components of LeVay's work. LeVay published several counter-arguments and a book as a form of professional rebuttle. However, when LeVay's sexual orientation was revealed, the reliability of his work was questioned in the public forum based simply on his sexual orientation and not on any methodological shortcomings his research may have had.

I do not contend that this system of scrutiny is "right" or "wrong," it simply is. When you enter an area where educators are being trained to approach homosexuality bisexuality in a non-judgmental way with 13-18 year-old students it is essential that every precaution is taken to ensure that the many hours of test construction and costly research does not fall on deaf ears within the public.

The Research Is Done, Now What?

Obtaining data on these programs is essential, but how can educators use this data effectively? Two issues are addressed when asking this question: 1) how can program changes be implemented, and 2) how can the data be used to demonstrate program effectiveness?

Because several different types of data will be reported, depending on the nature of the study conducted, I will limit my discussion here to translating and using simple pre- and post-training questionnaire data. If you have administered a Likert-scale (five or

seven options for each test item) that ranges from highly accepting to highly against certain behaviors, you will receive scores on each item which indicate the level of change in trainee attitudes from the time the pre-test is administered up until the time the post-test is administered.

For this example, assume that several items on the questionnaire represent each component [i.e. coming-out issues, suicide counseling, recognizing signs of isolation, etc.] of that educator training. By comparing the amount of change in participants on each item (data will include these statistics), you can go back and look at how that section of the training was administered (i.e. group activities, lecture, reading materials, etc.) and estimate what methods or materials seemed to have had the greatest effect.

Note here that doing one measurement of the training will be of little use if the trainee numbers are low. Ideally, organizers would look at data on several training sessions when comparing individual components. However, unless the training is done using the same methods and materials for every study being compared, very little useful information will be obtained. Using a different method, say lecture without supplemental readings on coming out issues rather than a lecture with readings, may have profound affects on how much attitude change is measured and will yield unreliable comparisons.

As to how this data can be used to "prove" training sucess, it is essential to remember that actuarial study never makes conclusions. Studies such as the one above merely show relationships. For example, participants in an educator training of this nature may read more material than is requested or may read none of it at all, and the data may turn out to be a measurement of more or less than the training alone. Therefore, all data on attitude change will have some measure of variability in it. Neither researchers nor training organizers can be conclusively sure that changes in trainees attitudes are caused by the trainings.

However, this data can *indicate* that attitude change occurred or did not occur during the period in which training took place. The strongest argument that training is correlated with attitude change is a matter of numbers. The more trainings that take place and the more data indicating attitude change collected, the stronger the relationship between the two is.

Once a relationship is established, the question becomes "what does this training actually do?" The most comprehensive way to report findings is to write a paper on them. While the researcher will almost always write a journal article, this article may or may not be of use. Journal articles are filled with statistical jargon that may be more technical than a report to school board members has to be. However, a well-written paper on where changes occurred and how these changes stand to benefit the school community as a whole offers proponents a tool for further implementation and/or validation of existing programs.

All data should be reported. If the research reveals low success in changing attitudes on a certain component (e.g. curriculum changes) then the reasons that organizers or the researcher believes the goals were not met should be included, as well as what changes in the training will be made to strengthen this component of training. Conversely, the data on components where attitude change is significant should be reported as well.

Conclusions

Dangerous and life-threatening situations face homosexual/bisexual youth in public high-schools and, while some schools are changing, this situation is not likely to change dramatically any time soon. While case-study reports have an emotional appeal to administrators and parents, large-scale empirical investigation of the ability to change attitudes and behavior are needed to validate educator trainings in homosexual/bisexual

youth issues.

Questions raised here and numerous others need to be answered about the effectiveness of such training programs. These questions are best answered by uninvolved, skilled professionals who utilize rigorous psychometric techniques. Van de Ven, Bornholt, and Bailey (1996) also suggest "parsimonious, plausible, and inoffensive" research is "not a trivial consideration when trying to get approval to conduct research with high school" populations (p. 160). The professionals who do this research should be solicited from a variety of fields, so long as they are well-trained in psychometric design and analysis. Also, if a base of actuarial study on homosexual bisexual youth trainings is to be realized, training organizers and developers must be willing to use highly similar methods and materials at every training session that is being researched and which will be compared.

Study of homosexual bisexual youth and their issues remains a frontier for investigation and educator training in this area may be a pivotal point where educators and psychologists can come together. However, the hurdle of public opinion remains a formidable one for both educators and researchers in this area. Proponents may find that the only schools where research can be carried out at will be schools in states such as California and Massachusetts, where public opinion is less heterosexist and training programs already exist.

References

Dunbar, J., Brown, M., & Amoroso, D. M. (1973). Some correlates of attitudes toward homosexuality. Journal of Social Psychology, 89, 271-279.

Center, The (1994). Lesbian and Gay Youth Fact Sheet [Brochure]. The Center Author.

Chaiken, S. & Maheswaran, D. (1989). Heuristic and systematic processing within and beyond persuasion context. In Unintentional Thought, ed. J. S. Uleman & J. A. Bargh, 212-252. New York: Guilford.

Craig, J. R. & Metze, L. R. (1986). Methods of Psychological Research. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Dennis, D. I. & Harlow, R. E. (1986). Gay youth and the right to education. Yale Law and Policy Review, 4(2), 446-478.

Friends of Project 10. (1989). Project 10 Handbook: Addressing Lesbian and Gay Issues in Our Schools, Fifth Edition [Brochure]. Friends of Project 10, Inc.: Author.

Haddock, G., Zanna, M. P., & Esses, V. M. (1993). Assessing the structure of prejudicial attitudes: The case of attitudes toward homosexuals. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 65 (6), 1105-1118.

Larsen, K. S., Reed, M., & Hoffman, S. (1980). Attitudes of heterosexuals toward homosexuality: A Likert-type scale and construct validity. The Journal of Sex Research, 16 (3), 245-257.

LeVay, S. (1996). Queer Science. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.Price, J. H. (1982).

Lipkin, A. (1996). Resources for Education and Counseling Faculty. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth Project.

MacDonald, A. P. (1974). The importance of sex role to gay liberation. Homosexual Counseling Journal, 1, 169-180.

Massachusetts Governor's Commision on Gay and Lesbian Youth (GCGLY). (1994). Prevention of health problems among gay and lesbian youth: Making health and human services accessible and effective for gay and lesbian youth. GCGLY: Author.

McFarland, W. P. (1993). A developmental approach to gay and lesbian youth. Journal of Humanistic Education and Development, 32, 17-29.

National Education Association. (1997, February). Focus on gays, lesbians, & bisexuals. New York, New York: Author.

Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1986). The elaboration liklihood model of persuasion. Advanced Experimental Social Psychology, 19, 123-205.

Petty, R. E. & Wegener, D. T. (1997). Attitude change: Multiple roles for persuasion variables. In Handbook of Social Psychology, ed. D. Gilbert, S. Friske & G. Lindzey. 4th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Placek award funds research on gay, lesbian issues. (1997, November). APA Monitor, 28 (11), 40.

Price, J. (1982). High school students' attitudes toward homosexuality. The Journal of School Health, 52, 469-474.

Reis, B. (1989, September). Why should the public schools teach about sexual orientation? Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Sexuality Education and Training.

Reis, B. (1996). Safe Schools Anti-Violence Documentation Project. Third Annual Report. Seattle, WA: The Safe Schools Coalition of Washington.

Ross, M. W. (1975). Relationship between sex role and sex orientation in homosexual man. New Zealand Psychologist, 4, 25-29.

Sears, J. T. (1989). Personal feelings and professional attitudes of prospective teachers toward homosexuality and homosexual students: Research findings and curriculum recommendations. (ERIC document No. ED312222).

Wilson, M. E. (1997). Educator training in Homosexual/Bisexual youth issues: Building a research tool. Unpublished Honor's thesis. Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Van de Ven, P., Bornholt, L., & Bailey, M. (1996). Measuring cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of homophobic reaction. Archives of Sexual Behavior,
25 (2), 155-180.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE